

PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF INTEGRATED EDUCATION IN POLAND

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Integrated education in Poland has been implemented since 1993. This alternative form of education very quickly resulted in an increased number of integrated classes in mainstream schools and a decreased percentage of students with disabilities in segregated education. Research indicates that the process of “opening of society to disability” is progressing. Despite the fact that the functioning of individuals with disabilities in the system of integrated education was investigated mainly through research conducted among teachers and students, there were not many studies indicating parents’ attitudes towards the implementation of that idea. Therefore, the main purpose of this paper is to describe the results of research on parents’ perceptions of integrated education in Poland. The presented article illustrates parents’ points of view regarding benefits of integrated education for children with disabilities as well as their peers without disabilities. Moreover, it depicts levels of parents’ satisfaction with integrated education. Findings revealed that 92 percent of parents, whose children had disabilities, were “very satisfied” and 8 percent of them were “fairly satisfied”. On the other hand, 84 percent of parents with children without disabilities were “very satisfied” and 16 percent were “fairly satisfied”.

Introduction

The socio-political transformation process in Poland initiated changes in the system of special education. Those transitions were related to the education of children with disabilities and their main goal was to include them in the mainstream education system. Such initiatives were undertaken in the name of integration, which requires members of the society to respect the rights of individuals without disabilities as well as people with disabilities.

The fundamentals of integrated education come from granting people with intellectual disabilities the right to be treated with appropriate respect that is common for the rest of the society and to allow them, due to the principle of fair support and education, to live in the community in an optimized and normal way. The most important catalogue of rights, which recognizes the dignity of a child as well as outlines its welfare, was included in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child from 1989. The rights of children with disabilities to full participation and equal chances in social life were outlined more distinctly and expressively in the Salamanca Declaration adopted by World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality (Spain, 7th and 10th of June, 1994). The Declaration states that:

- every child has the fundamental right to education, and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning;
- every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities and learning needs;
- the education systems should be designed and educational programmes implemented to take into account the wide diversity of these characteristics and needs; t
- those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools that should accommodate them within a child-centred pedagogy capable of meeting these needs;
- regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all;
- -moreover, they provide effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system (The Salamanca Declaration 1994, VIII).

The process of integrated education in Poland was introduced via Regulation No. 29 of the Ministry of National

Education passed on 4 October 1993 regarding the rules of organizing care and education of students with disabilities in mainstream and integrated public kindergartens, schools, facilities and special education institutions (Journal of Laws of the Ministry of Education from 1993, No. 9, item 36). The Regulation has been modified many times. The currently valid legislative act is the Regulation of the Ministry of National Education passed on 17 November 2010 regarding the conditions of organizing education and care of children and youth with disabilities and socially maladjusted children in kindergartens, schools and mainstream or integrated classes (Journal of Laws of the Ministry of Education from 2010, No. 228, item 1490, as amended). The given possibility of education in the integrated system very quickly resulted in an increased number of integrated classes in mainstream schools and a decreased percentage of students with disabilities in segregated education at the expense of their increase in non-segregated education. As early as in the academic year of 1996/1997 in the integrated system there were 14,500 children with disabilities and in 1999/2000 their number increased to 24,723 (Krause, 2004, p. 230). In the academic year of 2007/2008 in integrated classes there were 27,918 children diagnosed as individuals with special educational needs (Apanel, 2009, p. 172). The above mentioned statistics clearly indicate that the number of children and youth with special educational needs who attend integrated schools is on the increase. It is noteworthy that this trend lingers in preschool and primary education, but on its higher levels the process of integration is breaking down. For example, in 380 kindergartens there were 4,245 children with disabilities and in 716 primary schools there were 15,369 students with special educational needs. In 378 gymnasiums there were 6,611 children with disabilities and in high schools there were only 1,666 (Apanel, 2009, p. 172). That negative perception of integrated education in Poland was continued by Starczewska, Hodkinson and Adams (2012) who conducted a critical analysis of perspectives and experiences of Polish teachers related to the inclusion and inclusive education. They found that the idea of integrated classes attended by small children in Poland ran efficiently. However, the integration of older children with disabilities in the mainstream schools did not run successfully.

The continuous dynamics of integrated education is mirrored not only by an increasing number of children with disabilities in mainstream schools but also by children's various types of disabilities. The best exemplification of this trend are statistics which indicate that "30 percent of the population are children with intellectual disabilities; students with physical disabilities constitute about 30 percent. Children with vision and hearing disorders (mostly mild) belong to the group of almost 20 percent of the population. The rest of the students with disabilities (20 percent) are children with emotional and behavioural disorders, autism and other disorders"

(Krause, 2004, p. 231). However, there are still some regions in Poland where integrated education is not widespread and it encounters the resistance of local communities.

The idea of integrated education is implemented from kindergartens where, being involved in common play, children have as soon as it is possible a chance of becoming more sensitive to the needs of other people through their presence at mainstream schools of various levels. Górnicka outlines that contemporary education of children with disabilities involves the following forms: special classes within primary schools and gymnasiums; integrated classes within primary schools, gymnasiums and trade schools; individual inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream schools; integrated and special schools (including educational and care institutions) (Górnicka, 2005, p. 382).

Integrated education in Poland is mainly based on Hamburg's model that requires from school authorities appropriate architectonic conditions within a range of providing necessary equipment and teaching aids for classes. It also requires cooperation from two properly prepared teachers. Apart from students without disabilities the class is attended by children with various developmental disorders. Therefore, the school should keep on the payroll additional specialists such as speech-language pathologists, therapists, doctors, etc. (Gajdzica, 2009, p. 67). To implement this model financial support is needed. Local municipalities, responsible for education, receive insufficient grants to make economic conditions of integrated schools stable. Thus, schools with a good infrastructure for children with disabilities are more often built by rich municipalities and big cities.

Analysing the literature related to integrated education it can be noticed that the term *child with disabilities* is more often replaced by *child with special educational needs*. In the Ministry of Education the Work Group for the Reform of Educational System for Students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) was established which clarifies that *special educational needs* are defined as needs that, due to development of children and youth, arise from their disability or are caused by other learning problems (definition made by the Workgroup for the Reform of Educational System for Students with Special Educational Needs) (Kosiorek, 2010, p. 144). These needs are defined on the basis of the previously established scale with regard to how a child keeps up with his peers. His problems with learning require implementation of a special educational approach. Therefore, such children should be taught by a specialized pedagogical staff and in an appropriate environment (Bogdanowicz,

1996).

Recently the term *integrated education* has been replaced by the phrase *inclusive education* and, as it is emphasized by some of specialists, both expressions slightly differ from each other. Al-Khamisy notes that the term *inclusion* gives a broader perspective on matters of teaching, planning changes in the educational system and social policy (Al-Khamisy, 2009, p. 174). In its scope there is contained a need to include children with disabilities into the mainstream schools. However, it is emphasized that the specific feature of inclusive education is focused on capabilities of a child. In consequence it means that schools should be more flexible so that they could be more responsive to the needs of children. Inclusion is also related to the idea of helping teachers in taking over responsibility for teaching all children in home schools and preparing them to teach children who are currently excluded from their local schools, regardless of the reasons for exclusion. This term applies to all children for whom school education is not a benefit and not only for those who were currently labelled as pupils with special educational needs (Rękawek, 2006, p. 50).

Integrated education in previous studies

Several years have passed since integrated education in Poland has been implemented. This alternative form of education of students with disabilities brought about significant achievements in the field of practice and theory associated with implementation of this idea. These effects are well recognized in everyday social life and at school. Research indicates that the process of “opening of society to disability” is progressing (Ostrowska, 2002, p. 60). In many studies it is emphasized that the attitudes towards people with deviation from the norm and the expectations regarding disability have changed. The mentioned above change especially refers to the way of approaching people with disabilities as well as how they are perceived. Ostrowska, Sikorska and Gonciarz state that “a special attention should be paid to the change of social atmosphere toward problems of those who are partially without disabilities. The life problems of individuals with disabilities were discussed more often without any hesitation. This refers not only to people with disabilities but also to their environment which shows a growing tolerance and understanding for life problems of those people” (Ostrowska, Sikorska & Gąciarz, 2001, p. 33). However, students’ knowledge about disability is still poor, being usually gained from family members – parents or grandparents (Kazanowski, 2004, p. 128) or – as noticed by Figarska – it comes from myths and stereotypes functioning in the society rather than certain experiences or direct contacts with those individuals (Figarska, 1996, p. 166). Often it is based primarily on television broadcasts (Świda-Ziemba, 1997,

p. 171). Therefore, the attitudes of youth, based on these resources, are often ambivalent.

On the other hand, studies on teachers' attitudes towards integrated education show that most of them accept the idea of integration, but do not manifest their willingness to undertake teaching in such classes. Minczakiewicz in her study noted that "almost 70 percent of teachers from primary schools would not like to teach pupils with intellectual disabilities in their classes" (Minczakiewicz, 1996, p. 136). Also, Erenc presented in his research that 71 percent of teachers are against the idea of establishing integrated classes where students with intellectual disabilities could attend (Erenc, 2008, p. 288-289). The main reason for the teachers' negative attitudes towards integrated education was the lack of adequate knowledge about this form of education and skills that would allow them to support a student in fulfilling his special needs (Chodkowska & Kazanowski, 2007, p. 21-22).

The results of the research conducted among school directors and teachers on changes in integrated education was analysed by Apanel. She stated that they perceive many positive as well as negative elements in this type of education. Among the positive aspects of this kind of education they indicated: achievements of good results in internal exams by students with special educational needs; increase of parents' activity in mutual cooperation with schools; increase of specialists hired in schools in accordance with needs of students with disabilities; development of transparent and precise solutions for the assessment of students with disabilities; increase of confidence and decrease of parents' fears whose children without disabilities start their education in integrated classes; elimination of mental barriers both in the local community and the pedagogical staff; training of teachers who are outside from integrated classes in order to support students with special educational needs. The most frequent occurring difficulties that were outlined by the interviewed teachers and directors included: the accumulation of a few children with behavioural disturbances in one group; difficulties regarding integration of children with autism and profound intellectual disabilities with peers without disabilities; lack of sufficient methodological support and specialized training (Apanel, 2009, p. 173-174). According to the answers of the teachers, interviewed they also emphasized financial difficulties that prevent the purchase of teaching aids and hiring specialists as well as a lack of funds for specialized trainings for teachers. Apanel also noticed in school reality certain dangerous phenomenon that in fact schools begin to "specialize in education of children with disabilities and enrol a growing number of students with disabilities whose problems become dominant at school" (Apanel, 2009, p. 176) and not every child can be included in an integrated class or mainstream school for the benefit of all. It occurs that school directors are under pressure exerted by parents and municipalities

when they enrol in their charters more children with disabilities than they should. It may cause numerous problems and difficulties in fulfilling the needs of those children and it hinders proper care over an entire class. However, the most significant problem of integrated education, perceived by Apanel, is lack of well-prepared pedagogical staff in this type of school. Krause, stating that “in the time when regulation entered into force we did not have appropriate human resources to fulfil its conditions and we did not educate specialists prepared to work as supportive teachers” (Krause, 2004, p. 232), because “teachers who support pupils with special educational needs must have specialized competencies that in mainstream schools allow children with various dysfunctions (disabilities) as well as on various educational levels to fulfil the compulsory schooling obligation” (Pańczyk, 2002, p. 263).

Some modification of teachers’ attitudes and improvement of their practical skills within a range of work with students, diagnosed as individuals requiring special education, were established in a project entitled “School for everyone” conducted in 51 mainstream schools. Al-Khamisy (2009, p. 174), describing the assumptions and the realization of the project, noticed that the most difficult problem for teachers who work with children with special educational needs is the increasing number of pupils in one class (mostly 30 individuals), who prevent fulfilling special needs of students with various degrees of disability. Cooperation with those teachers within the framework of the project as well as methodical help for them became the most useful in the following areas: development of individual educational programs for students with disabilities; assessment of students with a disability degree certificate; organizing at schools campus support groups consisting of teachers; helping teachers in contacts with parents of children with disabilities. The mentioned above author suggested obligatory introduction of a new model of education for teachers at all levels that accommodates the specificity of disability (Al-Khamisy, 2009, p. 182). The studies, focused on integrated education, were also related to identifying how the needs of children with disabilities within a range of their contact with peers without disabilities were met in integrated school. It was assumed that further psychosocial development of children with disabilities as well as their ability to live independently depended on fulfilling their needs (Wiśniewska, 2009, p. 163). The positive outcomes from good contact of children with disabilities with their colleagues without disabilities was outlined by Minczakiewicz who stated that “these contacts allow them to preserve psychological stability and to go through the particular stages of social life that in the future will help them with better coping with difficult situations” (Minczakiewicz, 2000, p. 5). On the other hand Maciarz outlined that every child, despite his or her disability or dysfunction, like every child, wants to be loved and accepted, to

achieve successes at school, to be accepted in peer groups, to participate actively in all events and activities in which their colleagues without disabilities participate (Maciarz, 1992, p. 14). The chance of meeting their needs is given to them by integrated education.

Wiśniewska, using the diagnostic poll method, tried to establish what are the needs of children with disabilities within a range of initiating and sustaining social contacts with other children at primary schools. She noted their significant diversity, depending on whether a child with disability was intellectually capable or not, or whether the child had additional behavioural disturbances. According to the results of her research, 44 percent of children with disabilities who were intellectually capable declared a large number of colleagues at school, whereas 83 percent of students with lower intellectual level stated that they have many peers. The same answer was provided by 50 percent of children with behavioural disturbances. As the author of the research wrote, in the case of students with a lower intellectual level, the differences within their answers were caused by the “unconsciousness of their own alterity” (being different from the others). Over a half of children with disabilities (56 percent) who were intellectually capable do not feel comfortable among their peers in the class (probably because of their low self-esteem). The majority of children with a lower intellectual level (67 percent) felt well in their classes. Half of intellectually normal children preferred spending their breaks and free time with their peers without disabilities. In contrast, children whose intellectual level was low in the vast majority (77 percent) prefer the company of their peers with the same level of intellect and they chose their friends from the group of individuals with low intelligence (Wiśniewska, 2009, p. 73). A significant percentage of children with an average level of intellect (67 percent) admitted that they often had difficulties in establishing contacts with peers. The most common cause of difficulties in establishing social contacts by children with different types of disabilities with their peers was fear of rejection. It was found that despite numerous opportunities of initiating social contacts, a large number of students were not able to make contact with their peers without disabilities. The children with disabilities did not feel any acceptance and empathy from the others (Wiśniewska, 2009, p. 166). Therefore Krause sceptically noted that “also integration capabilities of the mainstream classes seemed to be, in many cases, illusive. That what seemed to be total integration became a trap within isolation and loneliness in misunderstanding, feeling different and worse than the others or funny” (Krause, 2004, p. 246).

Some information regarding causes of situation of children with disabilities in class rooms was provided by Rudek in her studies, conducted using a sociometric test in classes from the 4th to the 6th grade of elementary

school. She stated that the position of children with disabilities depended on the type of disability as well as their personal characteristics. Children with disabilities but without behavioural disturbances were fully accepted and treated on equal rights with other students. Those children were also included in all matters of family life. In contrast, students with disabilities and behavioural disturbances, due to their personal characteristics such as quarrelsomeness and aggressiveness, were ranked lower and functioned usually on the fringes of the class, being isolated. They were kept away from significant problems for the majority of students and very often their behaviours were not accepted. The lower-level position was occupied by children with speech impediments and hearing impairments, because they were perceived as an obstacle in the process of communication with their peers (Rudek, 2005, p. 165).

Parents' perceptions of integrated education

The functioning of individuals with disabilities in the system of integrated education was investigated mainly through research conducted among teachers as well as students and persons who embodied the idea of integration in particular social conditions. There were not many studies indicating parents' attitudes towards the implementation of the idea of integrated education or describing their feelings and beliefs related to experiencing that idea by their children. Kazanowski in his study investigated the changes in attitudes of parents and children towards integration of students with intellectual disabilities at school. According to the results of his research, the parents interviewed had more positive attitudes towards the idea of integrated education of children with intellectual disabilities than their children (Kazanowski, 2011, p. 300). He stated that "individuals representing the generation of parents significantly more often than the generation of their children acknowledge that children with disabilities who attend integrated classes easily establish relationships with their peers out of school" (Kazanowski, 2011, p. 302). The most significant barriers which obstruct the engagement in supporting the concept of educating children with intellectual disabilities with peers without disabilities, in the perception of the both interviewed groups were "the requirement of teachers to devote more time to them than it is possible" and "probability that a child with disability would be isolated by pupils at an elementary school". Moreover, from the results of his research it could be concluded that mothers were more convinced than their sons that integration of a child with intellectual disabilities is conducive to his independence and also positively affects peers without disabilities (Kazanowski, 2011, p. 307).

In order to explore parents' perception within a range of integrated education in 2012, a survey was conducted

among 100 parents whose children attended institutions such as kindergartens or elementary classes of primary schools in the Opole district. Half of the people interviewed were parents of children with disabilities and the second half were parents of children without disabilities

The individuals, being asked about the idea (mission) that was implemented in integrated schools, similarly declared (approximately 40 percent in each group) that the above mentioned idea was teaching tolerance and acceptance for people with disabilities (table 1.). There appeared some differences between the answers given by the interviewed groups regarding the explanation of the term “mission”. For instance, parents of children without disabilities (28 percent) defined the term “mission” mainly as “inculcate respect and empathy towards people with disabilities”, whereas parents of children with disabilities (48 percent) explained it as “equality”. The statements were definitely related to the personal needs and beliefs of the parents interviewed and proved that they were very aware of the general idea which became the basis for organizing integrated education.

TABLE 1. Mission implemented by integrated education institutions in the perception of the interviewed parents

Specification	Answers of parents				Total	
	Parents of children without disabilities		Parents of children with disabilities			
	N = 50	%	N = 50	%	N = 100	%
Teaching acceptance and tolerance for individuals with disabilities	20	40.0	20	40.0	40	40.0
Inculcate respect and empathy towards people with disabilities	14	28.0	4	8.0	20	20.0
Equality	6	12.0	24	48.0	30	30.0
Better development of individuals with disabilities	4	8.0	6	12.0	10	10.0
Education without dividing people and without prejudice	4	8.0	2	4.0	6	6.0

Attention: the percentages do not sum up to 100 percent because respondents could pick more than one answer.

The description of benefits of integrated education for children in the perception of their parents for both of the interviewed groups is presented in Table 2. The statistical data included in table 2 allow stating that the results of the research conducted were strongly diversified. Parents of children without disabilities distinguished the following important benefits of integrated education: “learning of tolerance and acceptance towards people with disabilities” (46 percent) and “greater sensitivity to the needs of individuals with disabilities” (30 percent) as well as “learning how to help others” (24 percent). In turn, parents of children with disabilities perceived integrated education as “specialist care” (44 percent) and “the possibility for better development in a normal environment” (32 percent).

TABLE 2. Benefits for children attending integrated education institutions in the perception of parents

Specification	Answers of parents			
	Parents of children without disabilities		Parents of children with disabilities	
	N = 50	%	N = 50	%
Greater sensitivity to the needs of individuals	15	30.0	0	0

with disabilities				
Better understanding of disability	7	14.0	0	0
Learning of perseverance and patience	6	12.0	0	0
Learning of tolerance and acceptance towards people with disabilities	23	46.0	0	0
Learning how to help the others	12	24.0	0	0
Specialist care	3	6.0	22	44.0
Chance for a new friendship	2	4.0	2	4.0
Sense of being accepted	0	0	10	20.0
Possibility for better development in a normal environment	0	0	16	32.0
Living with peers without disabilities	0	0	6	12.0
Self-acceptance	0	0	5	10.0

Attention: the percentages do not sum up to 100 percent because respondents could pick more than one answer.

Moreover, it was found that 92 percent of parents, whose children had disabilities, were “very satisfied” with integrated education, whereas 8 percent of them were “fairly satisfied”. In contrast, 84 percent of parents whose children without disabilities were “very satisfied” with integrated education and 16 percent were “fairly satisfied”.

Among the tasks fulfilled by integrated education the parents interviewed outlined “compensating deficiencies within the intellectual sphere” as well as “stimulation of socio-emotional development”. The above findings were illustrated by the following statements: “I am very satisfied with the progress made by my daughter in learning. Now she began to work better and to cooperate. Since we have started attending Braille course we noticed that she has made considerable progress. She already knows the entire Braille alphabet and wants to learn it on her own. Now our daughter likes spending time with her peers. Before it was definitely worse. She did not initiate any contact with other children. Now it is changing and sometimes our daughter gets involved in playing with other peers” (the literal utterance of a mother who has a blind daughter).

Another example of parents’ opinions regarding integrated education was the case of a mother who had a son with cerebral palsy. The mother interviewed, being asked about the progress made by her child attending an integrated education institution stated that: “Now my child establishes relationships easily. He learns faster. He became more independent and outgoing. He is more physically active. He can work longer, for instance, he draws more”. In the meantime the mother of a girl with autism said: “It wasn’t easy at all. A child with autism in

a classroom becomes a real challenge for everyone. I overcame the resistance and fear felt by teachers, because I believed that a regular school is the right place for my daughter. I knew that my daughter was smart and intelligent and that she would cope at school. We achieved that goal. Today I know that restoration of child's ability to function wouldn't be possible without attending regular school and contacts with other peers".

The statements of parents with children without disabilities outlined the possibility of teaching them how to help the others. The best exemplification of the above mentioned parents' position were the following statements:

"Our child learns how to get to know life "with defect" and how to help and take care of such children". It is to our children's benefit - so when they meet such children in their everyday life they wouldn't ask them and their parents some unnecessary questions"; "My child gains a lot while attending integrated class, because he learns how to cooperate with other children and how to help the others".

Parents of children with disabilities, describing their progress related to integrated education, mainly emphasised that their child "has better communication skills with other people" (82 percent), "overcame fear of their peers and more often plays with them" (80 percent). Different point of view was presented by parents of children without disabilities who stated that one of the most positive outcomes from their children's participation in integrated education was that they learnt to "accept children with disabilities" (84 percent), "how to help them with performing independently activities of daily living" (60 percent), "how to cheer them up when they are sad" (70 percent) as well as "how to protect them against any harm done by children who don't understand what disability is" (60 percent).

From the perspective of parents of non-disabled children among the negative effects of integrated education were the following arguments: "children without disabilities can feel fear of non-typical behaviours of children with disabilities" (60 percent), "problems, caused by challenging behaviours of children with disabilities, can occur during classes" (20 percent) and "there can be time constraints in effective influence on children with and without disabilities" (50 percent). Amidst propositions which could improve the effectiveness of work in integrated classes, the parents interviewed suggested specialised courses for teachers and pedagogues as well as change of architectural conditions, especially removal of existing obstacles, including architectural barriers and montage of new elevators.

Discussion

The aim of the presented paper was to describe the results of research on parents' perceptions of integrated education in Poland. The findings can be summarized as follows. First, the results of research indicated that 92 percent of parents whose children had disabilities were "very satisfied" and 8 percent of them were "fairly satisfied". Furthermore, 84 percent of parents who had children without disabilities were "very satisfied" with integrated education, whereas 16 percent of them were "fairly satisfied". Second, 82 percent of parents of children with disabilities, who were asked to describe their progress related to integrated education, outlined that their children had better communication skills with other people. Moreover 80 percent of those parents stated that their children overcame fear of their peers and more often played with them. A different stand was taken by parents of children without disabilities. 84 percent of them claimed that one of the most positive outcomes from their children's participation in integrated education was that they learnt to how to accept children with disabilities. In addition, 60 percent of those parents stated that they learnt how to help their children with performing independently activities of daily living. 70 percent of parents whose children were without disabilities declared that they also learnt how to cheer them up when they are sad and 60 percent of them learnt how to protect them against any harm done by children who don't understand what disability is. Third, among the most important benefits of integrated education, parents of children with disabilities listed specialist care (44 percent) and the possibility for better development in a normal environment (32 percent). In contrast, parents of children without disabilities distinguished the following important benefits of integrated education: learning of tolerance and acceptance towards people with disabilities (46 percent) and greater sensitivity to the needs of individuals with disabilities (30 percent) as well as learning how to help others (24 percent).

While considering the results of this study it is noteworthy to emphasise that there were not many research works indicating parents' attitudes towards the implementation of the idea of integrated education. The above findings partly support the results of research conducted by Kazanowski, in which he found that parents had more positive attitudes towards the idea of integrated education of children with intellectual disabilities than their children (Kazanowski, 2011, p. 300). Moreover, the results gained also confirm the findings of the study conducted by Hanline and Halvorsen who found that although parents of children with disabilities identified areas of concern, they consistently expressed satisfaction regarding the outcomes of integrating their child, including professional and personal support (Hanline & Halvorsen, 1989, p. 487). Regarding the results, related

to satisfaction from integrated education declared by parents who had children without disabilities, they seem to be similar to the findings of Peck, et al. who stated that 389 parents indicated that they generally perceived their non-disabled child to have benefited from this experience (Peck, et al., 2004, p. 135).

The results of the research conducted indicate a few implications for parents, as well as for teachers. First, parents of children with disabilities and their peers without disabilities should more constructively use their positive attitudes towards the idea of integrated education to encourage pupils to cooperate with their peers and teachers. Second, teachers must more often question pupils and parents about their fears associated with children's functioning in the classroom. Third, parents must ensure that children have more occasions to meet with their peers after classes to share some common interests. Fourth, teachers must be more involved in activities where parents and their children can participate together.

Although the results of this study indicate some useful implications a few limitations must be acknowledged. Because of the lack of present statistical data on the population of children with disabilities and their families living in Poland snowball sampling was used in this study. Despite the fact that the non-probability sample cannot be used to relate it to the general population, the results are still noteworthy and some assumptions can be made. Another limitation is that the studies were only focused on parents. The particular sample was chosen intentionally as our intention was to focus only on parents and their perceptions of integrated education in Poland. Although we did not create any theoretical construct within a range of parents' perceptions of integrated education we hope that researchers will undertake further investigations, improve and evaluate the empirical findings in this paper.

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